

# GPAC Meeting #8 Summary

October 19, 2021



## Introduction

On October 19, 2021, the City of Ventura General Plan Update (GPU) team convened the 8th meeting of the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC). The primary meeting objectives were to:

- Continue the discussion on the vision and guiding principles, with a focus on defining the “small town” and “unique” character of Ventura in specific terms.
- Review results and discuss takeaways from the Visioning Survey.
- Review a draft “areas of discussion” map prepared by the GPU team.

The meeting was open to the public and live-streamed to YouTube. This document summarizes the key content presented and themes discussed in the meeting.

## Meeting Participants

The following participants attended the meeting:

### General Plan Team

- Matt Raimi, Raimi + Associates
- Simran Malhotra, Raimi + Associates
- Lilly Nie, Raimi + Associates
- Susan Harden, Circlepoint
- Peter Gilli, City of Ventura
- Neda Zayer, City of Ventura

### GPAC Members

- Lorrie Brown, GPAC Chair
- Doug Halter, GPAC Vice Chair
- Philip Bohan, GPAC
- Stephanie Caldwell, GPAC
- Kyler Carlson, GPAC
- David Comden, GPAC
- Joshua Damigo, GPAC
- Nicholas Deitch, GPAC
- Peter Freeman, GPAC
- Kacie Goff, GPAC
- Stephanie Karba, GPAC
- Erin Kraus, GPAC
- Louise Lampara, GPAC
- Bill McReynolds, GPAC
- Daniel Reardon, GPAC
- Sabrena Rodriguez, GPAC
- Alejandra Tellez, GPAC
- Dana Worsnop, GPAC

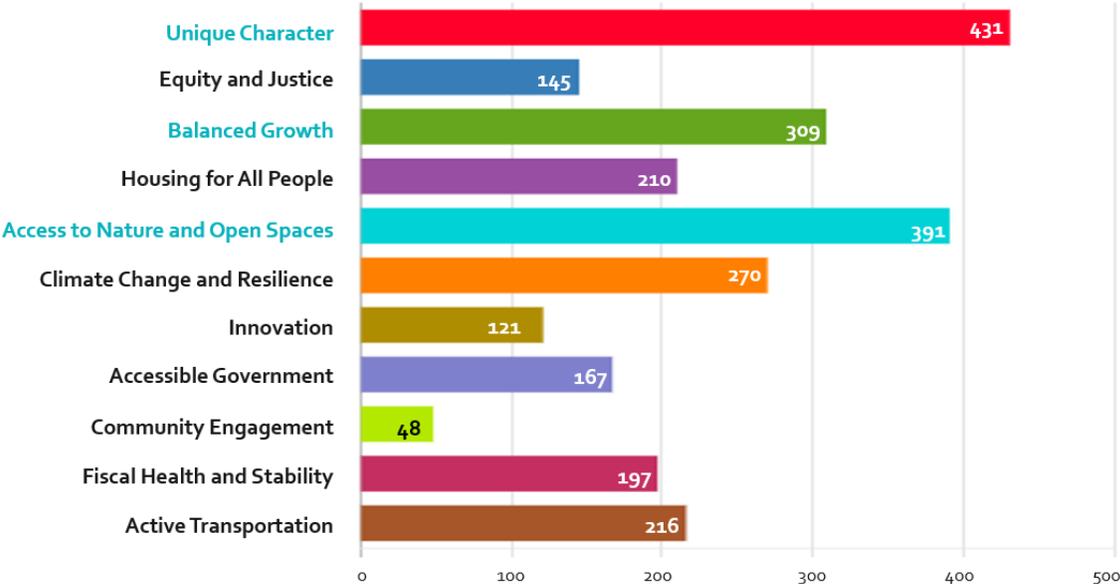
# Meeting Format

Susan Harden began the meeting with a brief overview of the agenda, followed by some project updates from Matt Raimi. Matt then gave a presentation that outlined high-level results from the Visioning Survey and reviewed how the survey fits into the overall process of developing the General Plan vision. This was followed by a discussion on “small town character” and “unique character” facilitated by Susan. Simran Malhotra then provided an overview of the survey results and the “Areas of Discussion” map, which identifies locations where growth, physical changes or policy changes could occur. Susan then facilitated a discussion about the survey results and the “Areas of Discussion” map. Given the robust discussion about the vision statement, the GPAC did not have sufficient time to review the “Areas of Discussion” map in detail and the group agreed that this topic would be discussed at the next GPAC meeting. The meeting concluded with a public comment session, with each speaker allotted two minutes.

## GPAC Feedback and Discussion

### Defining “Small Town Character” and “Unique Character”

As a part of the Visioning Survey, participants were asked to pick their three most important community values. (See below for the full list of the community values, as well as the survey results from that question). These values are a revised version of the core values presented to GPAC members during the 6<sup>th</sup> GPAC meeting, which focused on visioning. Unique character, access to nature and open spaces, and balanced growth were the top three values identified.



Recognizing that “small town character” and “unique character” are subjective terms that have often been used to describe Ventura, GPAC members were asked to share their thoughts on the following questions:

- What elements of “small town character” should we preserve or aspire to?
- What does “unique character” mean to you?

- Do you have any other comments on the vision?

A summary of GPAC comments is below:

#### *Unique and Beautiful Geography*

- A unique location between the hills and the beach
- A City of two rivers, separated and distinguished from neighbors in all directions
- The view from Downtown right down to the ocean evokes feelings of “small town character”
- Fantastic weather
- Central location with proximity to a lot of places
- Access to open space and the beach
- Distinctive role of agriculture in the community; City committed to maintaining farmland through SOAR
- Strong geographical contrast, from parks and agricultural land to rivers, beaches, and ranches

#### *Walkable and Bikeable*

- Easy access to amenities
- Having everything you need within walking distance without having to travel outside of your neighborhood
- Lively, walkable downtown

#### *Close-Knit and Engaged Community*

- Friendly community with unpretentious residents
- Having micro-communities within the larger city
- A connected, active, and engaged community
- Family-oriented
- A blue-collar, educated, open-minded beach community
- Can't go anywhere without running into someone you know
- A place where we all recognize each other
- Being on a first-name basis with all your neighbors
- Many small, locally owned businesses as opposed to big box chains
- Engaged neighborhood councils
- Smaller neighborhood schools
- Many multigenerational families who have lived and worked in Ventura for a long time
- Having a feeling of belonging, where you either have roots or feel that you can develop and build roots
- Culture of strong community involvement, where everyone has the desire to work together on solutions and help each other out
- The ability to have direct access and contact with city staff and City Council members

#### *Distinct Land Use and Community Character*

- Diverse neighborhoods
- No high-density development
- No sprawl
- No strip malls or large housing complexes

### *Additional Thoughts on Small Town and Unique Character*

- Downside of the “small town” feel is that you tend to look past features that aren’t great about the community and remain fearful of change
- “Small town” feel associated with the desire to minimize changes in the City
- Challenge of maintaining and improving the great characteristics of the City while also addressing issues in the community and allowing it to evolve
- More “polish” needed, meaning clean, safe, comfortable, family-friendly public spaces; however, too much “polish” would eliminate the unique character and detract from the “small town” feel
- The term “small town character” doesn’t accurately reflect Ventura’s population size
- The term can make people of color feel unwelcome since the term connotes White suburbia

## Survey Results and Areas of Discussion

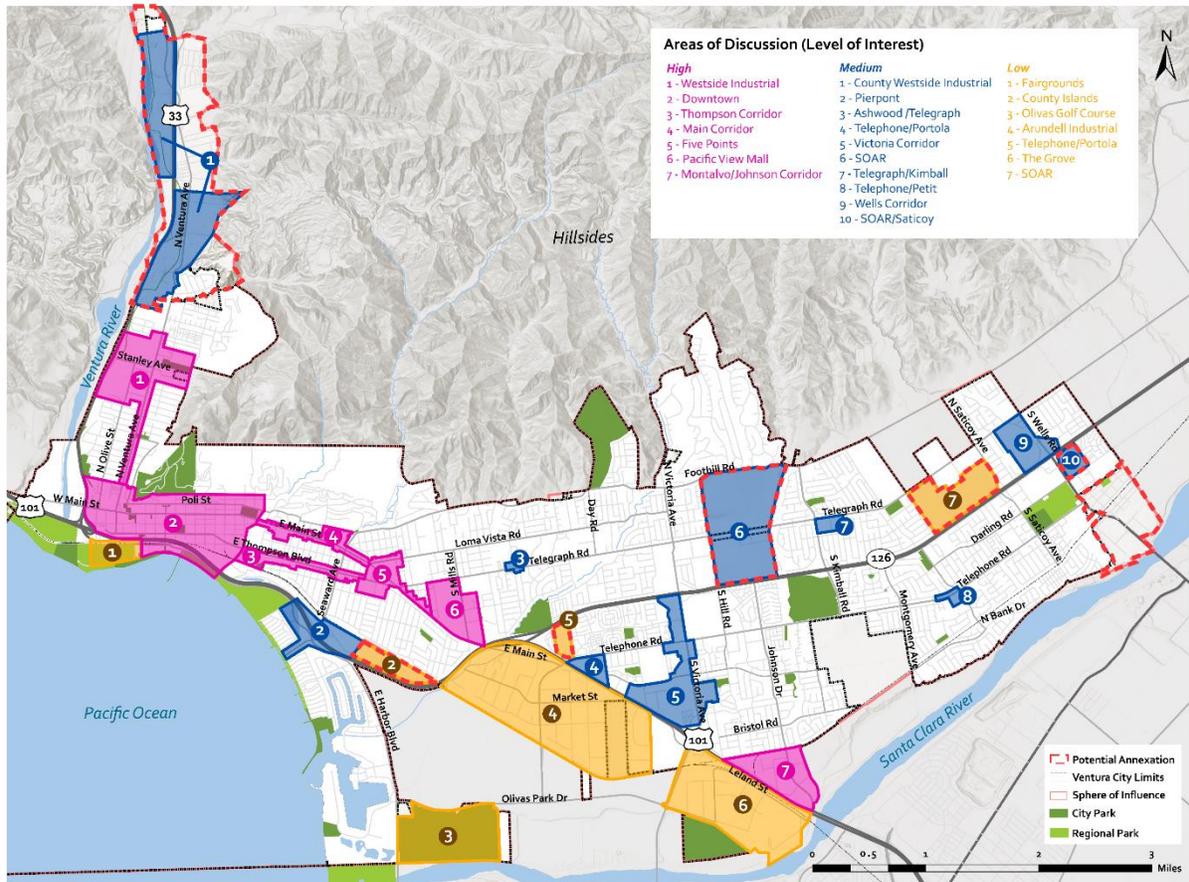
Following the discussion on defining the “small town” and “unique” character of Ventura, the General Plan Team provided an overview of the Vision Survey results. The Vision Survey, which was conducted through the Maptionnaire survey platform, asked questions about the potential location for new uses in the City. The survey was open from August 24<sup>th</sup> to October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021. Overall, over 1,500 people answered at least one question in the survey and 874 respondents completed the survey. The survey results can be found [here](#).

Based on the survey results, along with results of other engagement activities (including two rounds of meetings with Community Councils, stakeholder interviews, meetings with City Council members, and GPAC conversations), the General Plan Team prepared a draft “Areas of Discussion” map (see below). The purpose of this map is to identify potential locations where new development could occur or where regulatory changes are needed to create a new vision for the area. The “Areas of Discussion” are the starting point for the development of land use alternatives.

Based on this information, the GPAC discussed the following questions:

- Did the survey results match your expectations? Was anything surprising? What conclusions can be drawn from the results?
- Does the “Areas for Discussion” map fully reflect the areas in the City that should be considered for the alternatives? What’s missing? What should be removed?

The following is a summary of the comments and questions about the Vision Survey and the “Areas of Discussion.” Note that the GPAC did not discuss the map in detail and the group agreed that this topic would be discussed at the next GPAC meeting.



*Comments on the Survey Results*

- Survey respondents not fully representative of the city’s population; need more input from younger individuals and renters.
- Unclear whether all respondents fully understand who owns the County Fairground lands and what the restrictions are for new development.
- Most feedback is in the Westside and Downtown, even though a lack of services, amenities, and walkability has repeatedly been identified on the Eastside.
- Doesn’t seem like results on the Westside necessarily reflect opinions of Westside residents (many residents don’t want more development, but the Westside is consistently identified as a potential area for change).
- Survey results are often contradictory, seems that it will be difficult to reconcile differences or reach a consensus.
- Would be helpful to correlate the responses with where respondents live to identify potential bias or patterns.

*Questions about the “Areas of Discussion” map from GPAC members*

- **Question: What is the history and context behind the SOAR islands within the city boundary?**
  - Answer: These areas were all agricultural lands at the time the SOAR designation was adopted. Since that time, some have fallen out of use, and that may be partly why certain SOAR areas were identified as potential areas for developing other uses.
- **Question: Fairgrounds is state property, so how do we have any input on what happens there?**
  - Answer: There are plenty of examples of fairgrounds that have evolved to include other uses. Although we would need to collaborate with the Fairgrounds board to make any changes, the GPU process helps identify a desire and direction for the land.
- **Question: How was the preliminary “Areas of Discussion” map created?**
  - Answer: This draft map was based on feedback from several engagement events, including the GPAC visioning meeting held in July 2021, community council meetings, pop-up events, the existing General Plan, and the Vision Survey results. The map is a first attempt at defining areas for land use alternatives and will continue to be refined. Note that the visioning result is only one data point and is not meant to be statistically valid.

*Suggestions and Comments About Draft Areas of Discussion*

- Danger of developing SOAR lands is that Ventura will lose the agricultural buffer that separates us from our neighbors and defines our “small town” feel
- Focus of change areas should be on infill development opportunities; need to increase housing in a way that fits in with the feel and character of the neighborhood
- SOAR county islands within city boundary could be considered infill opportunity
- Fairgrounds is an underutilized parcel that needs “out-of-the-box” thinking; can suggest better locations that doesn’t interfere with Downtown commerce and residents and has appropriate parking
- Concerned about the health impacts of placing more housing in industrial areas
- The kind of housing that could be accommodated in industrial areas may include live-work developments, trade shops, and other unique uses that wouldn’t be comfortable in denser residential areas
- Surprised that many respondents supported annexing some of the SOAR county islands
- Surprised that potential new trails identified by respondents were only on the eastside
- Concern over the future of new mixed-use development, considering the uncertainty of brick-and-mortar retail
- Government Center is a great opportunity site for infill development; would like to see the City engage with the County to develop affordable housing for county workers there

The conversation ended with an acknowledgment that the General Plan Team will do the following:

- Conduct a more detailed analysis of the survey results by demographic group.
- Continue efforts to engage renters and other residents who typically do not participate in planning processes.

- Provide more background and context that led to the development of the “Areas of Discussion” map.
- Continue the discussion on the map at the next GPAC meeting.

## Public Comment

Several individuals spoke during public comment at the close of the meeting. Comments are summarized below:

- We can't live in the moment, and we must remember that the General Plan is focusing on the future of the City; City Council is considering removing parking along Main Street, and this may exacerbate parking issues; housing in the Government Center was actually discussed in the Victoria Corridor Plan several years ago; a freeway cap is a good opportunity to improve accessibility for residents and visitors.
- Change is the only constant in our lives. We're either going to evolve and adapt to the changing world around us, or we're going to atrophy and decline. It's important to go outside of our comfort zone and embrace concepts that aren't necessarily consistent with what Ventura has traditionally been like in the past but are aligned with where we want to be in the future.